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### Rare models: Roger Casement, the Amazon, and the ethnographic picturesque

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## Rare models: Roger Casement, the Amazon, and the ethnographic picturesque

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In 1910 Roger Casement was sent by the British government to investigate the alleged humanitarian abuses of the Peruvian Amazon Company in the Putumayo, a disputed border zone in North West Amazonia. Casement brought more than verbal and written testimony back to London. On 26 June, some six months after he returned from the Amazon, Casement collected two Amerindian boys – Omarino and Ricudo – from Southampton docks. This paper will reconstruct the brief period that these young men spent in Britain in the summer of 1911 and assess, in particular, to what extent they were treated as ‘exhibits’ by Casement, who not only introduced them to leading members of the British establishment but also arranged for them to be painted and photographed following contemporary ethnographic conventions.

**Keywords:** Roger Casement; Putumayo; imperialism; ethnography; photography

### Introduction

Almost a century after his death by hanging in 1916, Roger Casement is remembered as an Irish revolutionary and co-conspirator in the Dublin Easter Rising. His name is also associated with the controversial ‘Black Diaries’, private journals describing homosexual encounters which were leaked by the British authorities during his 1916 trial.<sup>1</sup> Although these diaries tarnished Casement’s reputation for a time, most recent commentators have focused on his work as a British Foreign Office investigator and as a tireless humanitarian, both in the Congo Free State and in the Putumayo region of the Amazon.<sup>2</sup> It is one of many contradictions in Casement’s life that he, a man who would be executed for his role in the Irish struggle for independence in 1916, had set off for Africa for a career in the colonies in 1884, had entered the British consular service a decade later, and had been knighted in 1911. In an oft-quoted recollection of Casement, Joseph Conrad, who met the Irishman in the Congo, describes him as an archetypal colonial adventurer:

I’ve seen him start off into an unspeakable wilderness swinging a crock-handled stick for all weapons with two bulldogs, Paddy (white) and Bidy (brindle) at his heels, and a Loanda boy carrying a bundle for all company. A few months afterwards it so happened that I saw him come out again, a little leaner, a little browner, with his stick, dogs and Loanda boy, and quietly serene as though he had been for a stroll in the park.<sup>3</sup>

Such paradoxes abound in Casement’s biography. As Helen Carr notes, from his infancy Casement ‘found himself on an ambiguous middle line in the divisions in Irish life’.<sup>4</sup> He was born in Dublin in 1864 to a Catholic mother and a Protestant father and by the age of three had been baptised twice, first into the Church of Ireland and later, secretly, into the Roman Catholic Church. Both of his parents died when he was still a boy, after which he

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was cared for by extended family in County Antrim and educated in the strongly Unionist Ballymena. The geographical and cultural itinerancy of Casement's youth was carried into his adult life by the choice of a consular career which took him from Portuguese East Africa (present-day Mozambique) to Brazil. Yet, even as far away as the forests of Amazonia, Casement would seek out signs of home. In the journal he kept during his investigations in the Putumayo, for example, Casement refers to the indigenous rubber workers as the 'begorrahs':

Whenever they get a present they stroke one's hand or shoulder affectionately, and say, 'Bigara, bigara' (Good, good) [...] we are constantly hailed with cries of 'Bigara', so I christened them this morning 'the begorrahs'. It sounds exactly like an Irish begorrah.<sup>5</sup>

In 1913 he would call a typhus-stricken Connemara the 'Irish Putumayo' and its inhabitants 'White Indians'.<sup>6</sup> Despite Casement's evident sympathy for the oppressed people of both the Amazon and the west of Ireland, such analogies betray a tendency to assimilation – a pervasive feature of European contact with its colonial 'Others'. The term 'begorrah' was, it should be remembered, a stock phrase of the stage Irishman (a euphemism for 'by God') and Casement's drawing upon it here not only repeats a colonial stereotype but also tends to collapse the distinction between two very different cultures.

Casement's relationship to Ireland was, like other aspects of his life, marked by estrangement. His fate was to be an Irishman in England, and an Englishman in Ireland. Unsurprisingly, his views on imperialism, especially the role of the British in Ireland, wavered throughout his life although the trajectory was always towards radicalism. Many point to the Congo investigations as a turning point in Casement's views of the British Empire – a shift best summed up by Casement in the following statement:

I had accepted Imperialism – British rule was to be extended at all costs, because that was best for everyone under the sun [...] [F]inally when up in those lonely forests where I found Leopold I found also myself – the incorrigible Irishman [...] I realised then that I was looking at this tragedy with the eyes of another race – of a people once hunted themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, by reflecting on an episode which has been largely neglected in Casement scholarship, this article will suggest that Casement's views on race and empire remained more or less consistent with British imperial ideology, at least with respect to non-Irish affairs, well after the Congo investigations were concluded. During the summer of 1911 Casement brought two indigenous youths from the Putumayo district of Colombia to his London home in order to raise awareness of the atrocities being perpetrated in the region by a British-owned rubber company. Under Casement's custodianship, the young men were introduced to leading members of the British establishment and became minor celebrities in Casement's London circle. Casement also arranged to have them photographed and painted.

This article will piece together the written and, in particular, the visual record of the young men's visit to London. Through doing so, it will explore how, despite Casement's active involvement in pro-indigenous organisations such as the Aborigines Protection Society and the Anti-Slavery Society and his deserved reputation for humanitarianism, his exhibiting of the Putumayo youths as living curiosities and 'native types' was consistent with what Timothy Mitchell has called the 'machinery of representation' dominant in European imaginings of its racial and cultural Others.<sup>8</sup>

### Casement in the 'Devil's Paradise'

The abuses against indigenous rubber workers in the disputed frontier zone of Putumayo, North West Amazonia, came to the attention of the British Foreign Office in 1909 when

the American traveller and adventurer Walter Hardenburg published a denunciation of the British-owned Peruvian Amazon Company (PAC) in the London journal *Truth* – allegations he later expanded in his book *The Putumayo: The Devil's Paradise* (1912). Hardenburg had travelled to the remote region with his friend W.B. Perkins in 1907, and had unexpectedly stumbled upon what was to become one of the most infamous episodes of twentieth-century Peruvian history: deep in the Amazon, indigenous tribes had been ‘driven into slavery, ravished, tortured, and destroyed’.<sup>9</sup> In 1904 Casement had compiled a distinguished report on rubber production in the Congo under King Leopold so it was unsurprising that, in 1910, the Foreign Office should select him to carry out a similar investigation into the treatment of indigenous rubber workers in the Putumayo. Casement’s arrival in the Putumayo on 22 September 1910 compounded the British government’s worst fears about the company. Hardenburg’s allegations were proved to be ‘in the main true’: local people had not only been forced to collect wild rubber, but had been (and were continuing to be) subjected to torture and terrorisation on an almost unimaginable scale.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout his stay in the Putumayo, Casement kept a travel journal in which he recorded his impressions of the region as well as witness statements of West Indian overseers (British colonial subjects) who had been employed by the PAC since 1904.<sup>11</sup> This travelogue would form the basis of a long report which Casement presented to the Foreign Office on St Patrick’s Day 1911, published in July 1912 as a government Blue Book. In both accounts Casement attributed the criminality of the Putumayo to its isolated position in the midst of a vast rainforest and to its legal status as contested territory. His official report opened with a long and detailed description of the location and topography of the Putumayo: the region lay ‘far from the main stream of the Amazon’, was ‘rarely visited’, and was in a ‘thick forest’. It was ‘practically a no-man’s land’, he concluded, ‘lying remote from any restraining authority or civilised influence, and figuring on maps of South America as claimed by three separate republics’.<sup>12</sup>

Casement’s sympathy for the indigenous people of the Putumayo resonates throughout his writings on the Amazon. In a quasi-ethnographic article entitled ‘The Putumayo Indians’, published in *Contemporary Review* in 1912, Casement draws upon well-worn tropes of the noble savage in his descriptions of the indigenous rubber workers as ‘averse to bloodshed’, ‘brave, intelligent, and capable’, ‘cheerful and courteous’, ‘submissive’, ‘innocent, friendly, child-like’, ‘chaste’, and ‘exceedingly modest’.<sup>13</sup> Casement’s ‘Putumayo Indian’ (itself a category that not only reiterates the colonial misnomer ‘Indian’, but tends to homogenisation given the region’s division into numerous tribes and sub-tribes) was, in many respects, as stereotyped and unconvincing as the convergent topoi of savagery and cannibalism being propagated by the PAC as a pretext for colonisation of the region.<sup>14</sup> His repeated references to the childlike nature of the indigenous people of the Putumayo endorses what Johannes Fabian has described as ‘a powerful rhetorical figure and motive, informing colonial practice in every aspect from religious indoctrination to labor laws’.<sup>15</sup> The childlike native was a stock figure of British imperial discourse; colonisers were thus cast as protectors rather than as oppressors of native populations.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, infantilisation was a particularly important strand of English representations of the Irish, as Declan Kiberd has observed: ‘All through the nineteenth century, the Irish had been treated in the English media as childlike – “broths of boys” veering between smiles and tears, quick to anger and quick to forget – unlike the stable Anglo-Saxon.’<sup>17</sup>

Casement’s rhetorical appeal to the childlike nature of the ‘Putumayo Indian’ was, then, consistent with British colonial discourse, although it also attests to his compassion for the victims of the PAC. Whilst in the Putumayo, Casement fed the starving locals from his own supplies, bathed the wounds of injured rubber workers and, on one occasion, dressed a sick

Amerindian woman in his ‘pajamas’ and gave her his bed for the night. Although Casement’s treatment of the rubber workers clearly transcended colonial ideology, his proposed solution to the problems facing them did not. Casement’s support for the establishment of a Christian mission in the region – what he termed, tellingly, a ‘*colony of compassion*’ (my emphasis) – reveals his view of the indigenous population as dependent on Europeans for protection and guidance. As the conclusion of his *Contemporary Review* article makes clear, Casement, in line with British imperial ideology, believed that the future of the Putumayo rested upon that familiar colonial figure – the paternalistic ‘white man’:

Is it too late to hope that by means of [...] humane and brotherly agency something of the good-will and kindness of Christian life may be imparted to the remote, friendless, and lost children of the forest still waiting the true whiteman’s coming into the region of the Putumayo?<sup>18</sup>

### Casement: the ‘true whiteman’?

Casement’s decision to bring a ‘native boy’ back from the Amazon in order to raise awareness of the Putumayo atrocities was made early on in his trip to the region. On 8 October 1910, just over two weeks after he arrived in the Putumayo, Casement recorded in his diary his intention to take ‘a boy home to try and interest the Anti-Slavery people’.<sup>19</sup> Although Casement criticised the tendency among the managers of the PAC to speak of the native people as if they were ‘sheep or cattle’, and was disgusted when one of them offered to give him a native man ‘as a present’, these high principles sit uneasily with the manner in which he eventually secured the release of the two youths he brought to London in 1911.<sup>20</sup> The following description of Casement’s first encounter with Omarino (alias Humurummy), whom he met on 31 October in La Chorrera, one of the principal rubber stations of the Putumayo, when distributing cans of food to starving rubber workers, is revealing not only of his paternalism towards the indigenous people but of his persistent tendency to regard them as spectacles:

I sent to the store for a case of salmon and distributed tins galore to men, women, boys and mites [...] They clicked their tongues and lips with joy poor souls and I photo’d a good many of them. They are nice bright-looking people – and I picked one dear little chap out and asked if he would come with me. He clasped both my hands, backed up to me and cuddled between my legs and said ‘yes’. After much conversation and crowding round of Indians it is fully agreed on, he will go home with me. His father and mother are both dead, both killed by this rubber-curse [...] The Captain asked for a present on the agreement – virtually the sale of this child – of a shirt and a pair of trousers which I gave him, and Macedo [manager of the rubber station] with great unction made me ‘a present’ of the boy.<sup>21</sup>

Later that same day Casement met another local, Ricudo (alias Arédomi and Pedro), ‘a married man of 19’, whom he won at cards and also decided to take back to England, leaving the young man’s wife behind.<sup>22</sup> Casement’s primary motivation for bringing the two youths back is noted in his journal:

My hope is that by getting some of these unknown Indians to Europe I may get powerful people interested in them and so in the fate of the whole race out here in the toils. Harley House and the A.P.S. [Aborigines Protection Society] will help and exploit the boys for all they are worth [...] <sup>23</sup>

Despite ostensibly rescuing the two youths from slavery in the Putumayo, here Casement reinserts them into an economic system (note his use of the words ‘exploit’ and ‘worth’). Through doing so, he commits an act of what Pierre Bourdieu would later call ‘symbolic violence’: ‘the gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognised as such, and is

not so much undergone as chosen, the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety'.<sup>24</sup>

In his journal Casement classified Ricudo as he would a specimen which conformed in all respects to the physical 'type' of an Amazonian Indian:

He is a fine youth, quite strong and shapely with a true Indian face. This youth [...] would make a fine type for Herbert Ward [...]

He has the fine, long strong hair of the Indians, the cartilage of the nose and the nostrils bored for twigs and a handsome face and shapely body. I gave him a pair of pantaloons, and he stripped the old ones off and stood in his *fono* [loincloth] – a splendid shape of bronze and I thought of Herbert all the time and how he would rejoice to have the moulding of all those shapely limbs in real bronze.<sup>25</sup>

Herbert Ward, an explorer and sculptor known for his life-size bronzes of African warriors, had become a close friend of Casement while he was in Africa.<sup>26</sup> In a previous diary entry Casement had speculated about taking a young Amerindian with a 'splendid figure', 'or one like' back to Paris for Ward: 'H.W. might help materially with a bronze figure in the nude of a "Putumayo Indian"'.<sup>27</sup> Casement made a detour on his way back to London from the Putumayo in 1910 to visit Ward in his curio-filled Paris studio (of which Casement owned several photographs, showing walls adorned with rows of spears and other items of ethnographic interest), and may even have spoken of such a venture, although the bronze was never realised.<sup>28</sup> Sculptures such as Ward's fierce-countenanced *Tribal Chief* or *Sleeping Africa*, which Frances S. Connelly regards as 'a plainly allegorical figure whose slumber embodies the supposed barbarity and ignorance of the entire African continent', give us some sense, nevertheless, of the kind of work that Ward might have created.<sup>29</sup>

Casement's aestheticisation of Ricudo's body as an *objet d'art* in his Putumayo journal upholds the discursive distinction between self/other and observer/observed which underpinned much contemporary ethnography. It also corresponds to a tradition of European writing on Native Americans, including the work of the natural philosopher Alexander von Humboldt, who on a number of occasions compared the bodies of indigenous people he saw in South America to bronze statues.<sup>30</sup> Such analogies have the effect of reifying indigenous people, and of transforming their living, feeling bodies into frozen and lifeless exhibits, bereft of agency and more significantly of speech. This view is, arguably, not far removed from the impulse behind imperial exhibitions such as the 'Festival of Empire Exhibition' which opened in London just a month before Omarino and Ricudo arrived in the capital, and which included, among other displays, a freak-show entitled 'Giants of Empire'. Casement's use of speech marks around his imagined bronze of a 'Putumayo Indian' signals an urge to classify and label the people he encountered in the Amazon, as he would a picture or an exhibit. Peter H. Hoffenberg has argued that the privileging of the visual in Victorian and Edwardian exhibitions was central to the periods' imperial cultural policy: 'Empire and nation were comprehensible, observed, and sometimes participatory pictures at the shows. By calling upon the authority of vision, exhibition officials expressed the idea of empire as a picture as well as a picture of empire.'<sup>31</sup> From his earliest references to Omarino and Ricudo, Casement's view of them was strongly inflected with this discourse of the colonial picturesque, a tendency which, as I will trace in the remainder of this article, increased when the youths arrived in London.

### Casement and two Amerindians in London

On 26 June 1911, some six months after he returned from the Putumayo, Casement collected Omarino and Ricudo from Southampton docks. Although the two young men

had left the Amazon with Casement in December 1910 they had spent the previous six months in Barbados under the care of a Revd Frederick Smith where they were supposed to learn English and adapt to life outside the forest. The Revd Smith wrote to Casement in early April 1911 to say that his guests were ‘beginning to speak a little English’ and had been ‘measured’ and fitted out by a tailor in order to supply them with clothes suitable for London.<sup>32</sup> However, a letter of 2 May 1911 reveals that the process of acculturation had not continued so smoothly:

The elder boy, Ricudo, seems to wish to return to the Putumayo [...] Indians as a rule do not like to stay in any one place for long. After a time they like to ‘take a walk’ as they call it i.e. they want to go to somewhere else. I am not certain that this boy wishes to return – but he has said so many times and I would not be surprised if one fine day, he, somehow or other got away. But of course I will do all I can to prevent it. He also informed Sealey’s son that he was a married man in his own country. He takes a little liquor now and again [...]

They are both very slow in picking up English. The little one Humurummy seems to get on a little better. They are in robust health, only Ricudo had a little looseness of the bowels for a day or two perhaps from the rum. But now he is quite well again.<sup>33</sup>

Although Casement stresses in his diary the fervent wish of both Omarino and Ricudo to accompany him to England, this letter suggests that the latter had by this point changed his mind. Smith’s expressed determination to prevent the man from ‘getting away’ certainly calls into question Casement’s self-styling as a liberator of the oppressed indigenous people of the Putumayo. Here Ricudo’s resolve is dismissed (not for the last time) by some contemporary racial theorising: ‘Indians’ are naturally nomadic and must be restrained.

There is no record of Casement’s response to Smith’s concerns. On 14 June 1911 Omarino and Ricudo boarded the Booth Steamship SS *Orotava* equipped with warmer clothing for the British climate (a precaution which turned out to be unnecessary given the record temperatures of the summer of 1911). During their short stay in London from June to August of that year, they largely resided in Casement’s lodgings at 110 Philbeach Garden in Earl’s Court although this was punctuated by visits to the house of Casement’s fellow traveller to the Putumayo, Luis Barnes, in East Malling, and to Knoll House, the summer residence of the Duke and Duchess of Hamilton in Dorset. In London, Omarino and Ricudo had a hectic round of social engagements, including meetings in the Foreign Office, with the Anti-Slavery Society, and with the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace.<sup>34</sup> Casement had also given some thought to Omarino’s future, and had accordingly written to the Irish poet and political activist Patrick Pearse regarding the possibility of sending the boy to his progressive, Gaelicist school, St Enda’s College in Rathfarnham, Dublin. Pearse had written back enthusiastically, espousing the hope that Casement and he could ‘make a success of the young barbarian’.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, Casement continued to speak on behalf of the youths, and to treat them as exhibits, speculating even about the establishment of a lecture tour to encourage support for a proposed mission to the Putumayo with ‘the two Indian boys on the platform’.<sup>36</sup> It is significant that nowhere does Casement refer to Omarino or Ricudo speaking. He views them always as something to be looked upon. ‘I have *shown* them to several people already’ he wrote to William Cadbury on 1 July, and on the same day he wrote to another associate, Henry Nevison, to say ‘I might bring one or two Indians on Tuesday – not to luncheon but to the Club so that you and your Nation of true men may *see the type* and feel that touch of fellow feeling that makes one’s work better and fuller.’<sup>37</sup> Minutes of a Foreign Office meeting attended by Casement on 7 July recorded: ‘Two native boys and a number of photographs were *shown* to the meeting.’<sup>38</sup>

The culmination of Casement's self-appointed role as spokesperson for Omarino and Ricudo and, by extension, all the 'Putumayo Indians', came on 1 August 1911 when the two Amazonian youths made front-page news in a London paper. An article in *The Daily News*, headlined 'Inferno in a Paradise', recorded a 'plain tale' of the Putumayo atrocities, apparently from 'the lips' of Omarino and Ricudo (whose names the reporter both misspells and mixes up).<sup>39</sup> Superficially, the article seems to be an expression of agency on the part of the young men, who are presented throughout as ambassadors for 'their people, the Witota [*sic*] tribe'. Much of the report reiterates a testimonial account taken from Ricudo and Omarino by Casement's Barbadian servant and interpreter, Frederick Bishop, in Pará on 15 December 1910, including harrowing descriptions of the murder of members of their families and the names of the perpetrators.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, a note that Casement jotted on his cutting of the newspaper article reveals that Ricudo and Omarino had little input in the 'interview': 'sent by Gardiner of *Daily News* at my request to me. He did not see the two boys except for a minute to shake hands with as they speak scarcely any English.'<sup>41</sup> The perspective of the interview was clearly a rhetorical device. Casement spoke on behalf of Omarino and Ricudo (he is called 'the interpreter' in the article), not only condemning them to silence but also choreographing their naive and exotic personae:

I met them in the studio of an artist who is painting their portraits, and found them in native dress, a loin-cloth of white bark. Their brown bodies are finely built, and their faces bright and intelligent. They may be savages: they are certainly gentlemen [...]

'They say,' said Omorino [*sic*], 'that our country was very happy before the white man came for rubber. Now it is very unhappy.'

I asked the interpreter what the title by which Omorino [*sic*] called me meant.

'God,' he said. 'It is the word that the Incas used for Deity. The Indians are very simple, and they regard white men as supernatural beings to be obeyed implicitly'.<sup>42</sup>

Casement's description of the 'Indians' as 'simple' draws on established colonial stereotypes of non-Europeans as not only artless but ignorant. It also tends to downplay the brutality of the white settlers in the region (surely not Casement's intention) by attributing the exploitation of the Putumayo's indigenous people to its own submissiveness rather than to coercion on the part of the PAC. In this newspaper report, meaning is generated not by Omarino's and Ricudo's words but by their bodies: bodies which, according to the journalist, attested simultaneously – and somewhat paradoxically – to both savagery and gentlemanliness. By presenting them in an artist's studio clad in 'native dress' – 'a loin-cloth of white bark' – Casement encouraged the reception of Omarino and Ricudo as paragons of primitivism, appealing to the contemporary interest in racial and cultural Others from the British Empire and beyond.

### Casement and the ethnographic picturesque

During Omarino and Ricudo's brief stay in England, two episodes in particular emerge as emblematic of Casement's view of the youths as visual embodiments of Otherness. The first of these was Casement's arranging for Omarino and Ricudo to sit for the painter William Rothenstein, in whose studio *The Daily News* journalist met them. In his memoirs, Rothenstein recalled painting them:

[Casement] arrived at my studio with two young savages. He had brought them, he said, from Putumayo; their parents had been cruelly butchered and their kindred enslaved. He was full of their wrongs, and wanted to plead their case in England. Would I help? He wished me to paint

the two youths, which I readily did. Their bodies were a rich golden colour, and their dress simple – but a few brilliant feathers strung together. Such models were rare.<sup>43</sup>

Although Rothenstein is well known for his portraits of public figures (including one of Casement), he had in the very year he painted Omarino and Ricudo put on an important exhibition of drawings made whilst travelling in India. A contemporary reviewer described the paintings as, taken singly, ‘a study of individual character, while over all there is the strange atmosphere of stillness which we feel to be expressive of the East – there is the race as well as the individual’.<sup>44</sup> His unfinished painting of the two young men (Casement took them back to the Putumayo before Rothenstein had a chance to complete it) also exudes this ‘atmosphere of stillness’ and can be situated in an iconographic tradition stretching back to the ‘Discovery’ of the Americas (see Figure 1). The staging of the portrait conforms to what Felix Driver has called the ‘ethnographic picturesque’: Omarino and Ricudo are painted in native clothes against a hazily naturalistic background, with props such as bright yellow and red feathers and beads symbolising their primitiveness and exoticism.<sup>45</sup> Although we do not know the extent of Casement’s involvement in the arrangement of the sitting for the



Figure 1. William Rothenstein’s unfinished portrait of Omarino and Ricudo.

portrait, it is noteworthy that the composition of Rothenstein's painting closely resembles that of a photograph of Ricudo taken by Casement in the Putumayo in 1910 (see Figure 2). The necklaces, headdress and armbands are identical to those worn in the painting, and the man's facial expression and posture are also little changed, apart from the introduction of a protective arm over Omarino's shoulder. Such continuity between the photograph and the painting suggests Casement's approval of, if not active involvement in, its staging. Although a portrait painter, here Rothenstein does not just delineate the sitters' faces, but – as in Casement's photograph of Ricudo – their nearly naked bodies. Ricudo's vast torso fills much of the painting whilst Omarino's frame looks much punier. The two in complimentary ways are cast as visual embodiments of the Putumayo – Ricudo's strength and vigour representing the tribal past and the fragile Omarino the present-day vulnerability of the oppressed rubber workers.

As well as organising the Rothenstein sitting, Casement also commissioned a 'big photographer' to take 'anthropological photos' of the two youths, again suggesting his observance of contemporary racial discourses which called for the precise documentation



Figure 2. Casement's photograph of Ricudo.

of the racial Other.<sup>46</sup> Some of these photographs, which up to now were thought to have been lost, are among the Haddon Collection in Cambridge University's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.<sup>47</sup> The two images which remain from this sitting, showing Ricudo and Omarino naked against a pale background, in half length front and profile shots, are paradigmatic within the genre of anthropological photography (see Figures 3 and 4). The 'big photographer' referred to by Casement was John Thomson, a pioneering travel photographer and photojournalist, born in Edinburgh in 1837. Thomson became active in photography in the mid-1860s when he began to document the landscape, architecture, and people of the East, including Ceylon, Thailand, Cambodia, Hong Kong, and China. In the late 1870s he worked alongside the sociologist Adolphe Smith on the project *Street Life in London* (1878–79), which documented the urban poor through text and, for the first time, photographs. After the 1880s Thomson became a portrait photographer in London, where he had studios first in Buckingham Palace Road, then in Grosvenor Street, and finally in 141 New Bond Street, where he photographed Omarino and Ricudo.<sup>48</sup>

David Green has argued that the development of ethnographic photography in the second half of the nineteenth century was 'paramount in the formation of a particular discourse of race which was located in the conceptualisation of the body as the object of anthropological knowledge'.<sup>49</sup> From the mid-1860s there was growing concern with the systematic recording of 'human types' in photography, culminating in John Lamprey's system of anthropometric photography, published by the Ethnological Society of London in 1869, which advocated the use of a background grid of two inch squares.<sup>50</sup> The late-nineteenth century traveller's companion *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* also gave advice about how best to photograph and describe native populations when travelling in 'uncivilised lands': 'It is desirable to have a soft, fine grained neutral-tinted screen to be used as a background. The screen should be sufficiently light in colour to contrast well with the yellow and brown skins.'<sup>51</sup>



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

The same John Thomson who photographed Omarino and Ricudo was, from 1886, Instructor of Photography for the Royal Geographical Society, where he tutored explorers such as Henry Stanley in the importance of photography as a means of ethnological documentation. According to James Ryan, Thomson, who was also a Fellow of the Ethnological Society of London, was one of many commercial photographers in this period who regarded their subjects ‘through the lenses of anthropological enquiry and the iconography of race’. Throughout his oeuvre, Ryan maintains, Thomson was ‘engaged in a project of racial classification’, categorising people according to racial type.<sup>52</sup>

Casement himself was clearly familiar with the norms of ethno-photography, having taken many pictures of Native Americans whilst in the Putumayo, including at least one of Ricudo. He also endorsed the current zeal for anthropometric guidelines by weighing and measuring many of the indigenous rubber workers. Casement’s desire to have Omarino and Ricudo photographed in accord with these conventions suggests his adherence to contemporary discourses of race which regarded human physiology and culture as intertwined. The young men, stripped of their shirts and made to pose for the camera against a light screen, are not only de-contextualised but also subjected to an almost forensic examination.<sup>53</sup> Their blank expressions in the photographs contrast with their more relaxed faces in Rothenstein’s portrait. The catalogue card attached to these pictures is predictably broad and uses the contemporary racial catch-all ‘Mongolian’: ‘Two slaves from Putomayo (*sic*) river, Up. Amazon, Colombia. Engaged in rubber industry and treated with great cruelty. Resemble the Malays in colour, features, height and build. One shows Mongolian cast of the eye.’ As Edwards has argued, ‘through photographs, the specimen, “types”, were neutralised and objectified for scientific use to be interpreted and reinterpreted’.<sup>54</sup> These photographs impart nothing of the young men’s lives or personalities (although the European haircuts and the just-visible waistband of Ricudo’s trousers hint of a history of deracination and subjection). In these photographs Ricudo and Omarino become ‘disoriented commodities’, represented out of place and time like

the tribal objects in Casement's photographs of Ward's studio.<sup>55</sup> Despite Casement's professed desire to bring the two youths to Britain so that their stories might be heard, these photographs elide the voice and subject the body – reduced to a generic racial 'type' – to the ineluctable gaze of the camera.

In a study of colonial exhibitions, Driver has discussed the ways in which 'live subjects' could sometimes produce 'unexpected visions and unscripted meanings'.<sup>56</sup> It is difficult to locate such moments of self-fashioning in Ricudo and Omarino's time in London. Thomson's ethnographic photographs certainly allowed them no such leverage, although Rothenstein's painting may have accommodated a degree of self-invention, as we can see from a letter he wrote to Casement: 'The boys turned up happily, & put on their ornaments with care – almost with pedantry, with the help of combs, water and a looking glass, & then stood like rocks.'<sup>57</sup> There is a suggestion here that Omarino and Ricudo might have generated their own meaning through self-ornamentation or through posture and gesture (Ricudo's arm around Omarino, for example). Nevertheless, the description of their petrified bodies could hardly be more passive. The visual and written record of the young men's trip to London is firmly rooted in contemporary racial discourses. Although Omarino and Ricudo must have provided very many 'unexpected visions' in the summer of 1911, these are not recorded by Casement, for whom they rarely transcend the generic type of 'Indian'.

## Conclusion

We never learn what the young men thought of London, apart from the view attributed to them in their 'interview' by *The Daily News*: 'London is very wonderful, but the great river and the forest, where the birds fly, is more beautiful. One day we shall go back.'<sup>58</sup> Even then, Casement had started to plan their return. Despite preliminary arrangements to send Omarino to Pearse's school in Dublin, Casement's approaching return to the Amazon to continue his investigation made him reconsider: 'I fear with me gone, they might not understand things and give great trouble – and there is the far off, later future to think of too.'<sup>59</sup> Casement's revised plans for the two young men (to send them to a school in Iquitos, Peru) was revised once again when he reached South America. One of the final references to Omarino and Ricudo among Casement's papers tells of how he handed them over to the family of the British Consul in Iquitos, George Babbington Mitchell: 'My big Indian has gone to Putumayo on a govt. launch with an order from the prefect to find his wife & bring her to Iquitos. I shall leave these Indians with Mitchell as they will end by being useful servants here.'<sup>60</sup> Casement's reference to Ricudo as 'my big Indian', though affectionate, tellingly employs the same terminology of possession that had so troubled him when he first heard it used among the managers of the PAC. Shortly after their return to Iquitos, Omarino and Ricudo disappear altogether from the written record. Mitchell wrote to Casement in March 1912 to tell him that Omarino had gone to work on a ship downriver and that Ricudo, newly reunited with his wife, had recently tried unsuccessfully to return to La Chorrera.<sup>61</sup> One final reference to Omarino and Ricudo appears in a letter to Casement dated 3 September 1912 from Mitchell's wife, now living in England:

About Ricudo and Omo, I was very sorry to leave Iquitos without knowing there [*sic*] whereabouts. I tried again and again to find out where they had gone but unsuccessfully, except for a report from a Spanish woman in the Arica who said Omo had gone away on a launch as he was bent upon getting to the Putumayo. When we moved to the Cazes' flat, Ricudo and his wife seemed very pleased with the change and quite happy, and we thought would perhaps stay with us [...] – but Ricudo *hated* work and said he was 'tired of it' and

must get away to the woods! We could not think where they had gone and never saw them after they left us – I knew you would be disappointed but it was inevitable.<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps it would be unfair to attribute Casement's anticipated disappointment at the disappearance of the young men to anything other than personal attachment. Nevertheless, it is hard to find in Casement's references to Omarino and Ricudo any indication that he considered them as individuals. Rather, they appear in Casement's writings and in the visual record of their time in London as embodiments of exoticism and Otherness. Casement's hosting of Omarino and Ricudo can be positioned within a much longer history of 'New World' encounters, particularly the collections by Europeans of American flora, fauna and, not infrequently, human specimens for display back home.<sup>63</sup> There is a record of another group of Amazonians coming to London almost 100 years before Omarino and Ricudo which has striking parallels with Casement's treatment of the young men. On this occasion a family of indigenous Brazilians was put on display as 'The Wilde Indian Chief, Wife & Child' in 23 New Bond Street (the very street where Omarino and Ricudo were later photographed). The family members had been rescued from slavery in Brazil by a French entrepreneur and brought to England where they were exhibited and sketched by I.W. Gear in naturalistic ethnographic poses.<sup>64</sup> It is notable that, during his two trips to the Putumayo in 1910 and 1911, Casement did not entirely occupy himself with collecting evidence against the PAC but also amassed a large quantity of ethnological material pertaining to the Putumayo, including masks and basket work. Casement's impulse as a colonial collector – which did not preclude the bringing home of live human subjects – is certainly one of the traits which might have made him, as Michael Taussig suggests, a 'marvellous ethnographer', but it is also one which should be taken into account when considering Casement's adherence or not to contemporary ideas of race and empire.<sup>65</sup>

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### Notes

1. For many years following Casement's execution conspiracy theories circulated with regards to the authenticity of the diaries, although now it is generally accepted that these documents were not forgeries.
2. This is the case in Ó Síocháin's biography *Roger Casement* and Goodman's recent *The Devil and Mr Casement*.
3. Cited in Carr, 'Roger Casement in the Amazon', 174.
4. *Ibid.*, 172.
5. Casement, *Amazon Journal*, 198.
6. See Ó Síocháin, *Roger Casement*, 355–6.
7. Cited in Ó Síocháin and O'Sullivan, *Eyes of Another Race*, vi.
8. Mitchell, 'The World as Exhibition', 221.
9. Enock, 'Introduction', 12.
10. Casement, *Amazon Journal*, 424.
11. For further discussion of the role of the West Indian workers in the Putumayo see Johnson, 'Barbadian Migrants'.
12. Casement, *Correspondence*, 25–7.
13. Casement, 'The Putumayo Indians', 320–5.

14. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, has argued: 'Native Americans were and are real, but the *Indian* was a White invention and still remains largely a White image, if not stereotype' (3).
15. Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 63.
16. Pennycock, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*, 60–61, has discussed the cultural construct of the adult and the child in English colonial discourse.
17. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, 104.
18. Casement, 'The Putumayo Indians', 328.
19. Casement, *Amazon Journal*, 203.
20. *Ibid.*, 110.
21. *Ibid.*, 340.
22. *Ibid.*, 341.
23. *Ibid.*, 342.
24. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 192.
25. Casement, *Amazon Journal*, 342.
26. See Ward's account of their friendship in Ward, *A Voice from the Congo*, 206–7.
27. Casement, *Amazon Journal*, 333–4.
28. These photographs are in the National Photographic Archive, Dublin: CAS27A; CAS28A; CAS29A.
29. Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason*, 17.
30. For example, Humboldt, *Personal Narrative*, 10.
31. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, 74.
32. Casement, *The 1911 Documents*, 208.
33. *Ibid.*, 291.
34. Mitchell is unsure whether the boys actually met the Archbishop of Canterbury: 'either the audience was very brief and unsatisfactory or did not happen at all'; see Casement, *The 1911 Documents*, xxxviii.
35. *Ibid.*, 386.
36. *Ibid.*, 462.
37. *Ibid.*, 435, my emphasis.
38. *Ibid.*, 453, my emphasis.
39. The article is reproduced in *Ibid.*, 534–6 (534).
40. National Library of Ireland (NLI), 13,087 (27/i-viii).
41. Casement, *The 1911 Documents*, 534, n. 342.
42. *Ibid.*, 534.
43. Rothenstein, *Men and Memories*, 170.
44. Anonymous, 'Mr Rothenstein's Indian Drawings', 757.
45. Driver, 'Geography, Empire and Visualization'. Driver's discussion of the representation of two African boys at the Stanley and African Exhibition in 1890 and the subsequent debates about their welfare has interesting parallels with the story of Omarino and Ricudo, especially in the way in which the young men's bodies were visualised.
46. Casement, *The 1911 Documents*, 498.
47. In *Ibid.*, 498, Mitchell notes that 'These anthropological photos [...] appear to have disappeared. At least, there are none amongst Casement's papers in the National Library of Ireland.' I would like to thank Jocelyne Dudding, Rachel Hand, and Wendy Brown of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology for facilitating access to the photographs.
48. See Pritchard, *Directory of London Photographers*.
49. Green, "'Classified Subjects'", 31.
50. See Edwards, 'Image as Anthropological Document'.
51. Cited in Green, "'Classified Subjects'", 34.
52. Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 161.
53. Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography*, has discussed the 'insistent dislocation of time and space' (7) in ethnographic photography.
54. Edwards, 'Image as Anthropological Document', 241.
55. The term 'disoriented commodities' is from Breckenridge, 'Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting', 198.
56. Driver, 'Geography, Empire and Visualization', 6.
57. William Rothenstein, letter to Casement, 15 July 1911. NLI, 13,073 (37).

58. Casement, *The 1911 Documents*, 536.
59. *Ibid.*, 546.
60. *Ibid.*, 609.
61. NLI, 13,080 (2/ii). I am indebted to Jeffrey Dudgeon for pointing me towards this and the subsequent reference.
62. NLI, 13,073 (10/ii).
63. For a discussion of the bringing of exotic Others to Europe see, for example, Feest, *Indians and Europe*; Poignant, *Professional Savages*; and Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounters*.
64. The story of this family is discussed in King, 'Family of Botocudos'.
65. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 15.

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